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HISTORY  
OF  
A GOOD BRAMIN.

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED, AN

ESSAY

ON THE

*Reciprocal Contempt of Nations,*

PROCEEDING

FROM THEIR VANITY.

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THE  
HISTORY  
OF  
A GOOD BRAMIN.

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IN my travels I happened to meet with an old Bramin. This man had a great share of prudence and understanding, and was very learned. He was also rich, and his riches added to his wisdom; for wanting nothing, he had no temptation to defraud any one. His family was admirably well managed by three handsome wives, who studied to please him; and when he was weary of amusing himself with women, he had recourse to Philosophy. Not far from his house, which was handsome, well furnished, and embellished with most delightful gardens, dwelt an old Indian woman, who was a great bigot, ignorant, and withal very poor.

I wish, says the Bramin to me one day, I had never been born! Why so? said I. Because, replied he, I have been studying these forty years, and I find it has been so much time lost; while I teach others I know nothing myself. The sense of my condition is so humiliating, it makes all things so distateful to me, that life is become a burthen. I have been born, and I exist in time, without knowing what time is: I am placed in the confines between two eternities, as our wise men say, and

yet I have no idea of eternity. I am composed of matter—I think—but have never been able to satisfy myself what it is that produces thought. I am ignorant whether my understanding is a simple faculty which I possess, like that of walking and digesting, or if I think with my head in the same manner I take hold of any thing with my hands. I am not only thus in the dark with relation to the principles of thought, but the principles of my motions are entirely unknown to me. I do not know why I exist, and yet I am applied to every day for a solution of these matters, and I must return an answer: I can say nothing satisfactory on the head: I talk a great deal, and when I have done speaking, remain confounded and ashamed of what I have said. I am in a still greater perplexity when I am asked if Brama was produced by Vishnou, or if they had both existed from eternity. God is my judge that I know nothing of the matter, as plainly appears by my answers.

Reverend father, says one, be pleased to inform me how evil is spread over the face of the earth. I am as much at a loss as they who ask the question. Sometimes I tell them that every thing is for the best; but they who have the gout or the stone, they who have lost their fortunes or their limbs in the wars, believe nothing of it any more than myself. I retire to my own house, full of curiosity and ignorance. I consult the writings of our ancient sages, and they serve to bewilder me the more. I  
talk



talk with my brethren upon the subject ; some tell me we ought to make the most of life, and laugh at the world : others think they know something, and lose themselves in vain and chimerical hypotheses ; every thing adds to the load I feel. Sometimes I am ready to fall into despair ; when I reflect, that after all my researches I neither know from whence I came, what I am, whither I shall go, or what is to become of me.

The condition in which I saw this good man gave me real concern : no one could be more rational—no one more open and honest. It appeared to me, that the force of his understanding, and the sensibility of his heart, were the causes of his misery. The same day I had a conversation with the old woman, his neighbour. I asked her if she had ever been afflicted at not knowing how her soul was made. She did not so much as understand my question : she had not even for a moment in her life a thought about these two subjects, concerning which the Bramin had so much tormented himself. She believed from the bottom of her heart in the metamorphoses of her God Visnou, and provided she could get some of the water of the Ganges to make her ablutions, she thought herself the happiest of women.

Struck with the happiness of this poor creature, I returned to my Philosopher, whom I thus addressed :—Are you not ashamed to be thus miserable, when not fifty yards from you there is an old Automaton who thinks of nothing, and lives con-

tented! You are right, replied he, I have said to myself a thousand times that I should be happy if I was but as ignorant as my neighbour, and yet it is a happiness I could not wish for.

This reply of the Bramin made a greater impression on me than any thing that had passed. I examined my own heart, and found of a truth that I myself should not wish to be happy on condition of being ignorant. I proposed this matter to some Philosophers, and they were all of my opinion; and yet, said I, there is something very contradictory in this manner of thinking; for after all, what is the question? Is it not to be happy? What signifies it then, whether we have understandings, or whether we are fools? Besides, there is this to be said: Those who are contented with their condition are sure of that content; whereas they who have the faculty of reasoning, are not always sure of reasoning right. It is evident, then, added I, that we ought rather to wish not to have common sense, if that common sense contributes either to our being miserable or wicked. They were all of my opinion, and yet not one of them could be found to accept of happiness on the terms of being ignorant. From hence I conclude, that tho' we may set a great value upon happiness, we set a still greater upon Reason. But after having maturely reflected upon this affair, I thought that there was great madness in preferring reason to happiness. How is this contradiction to be explained?—Like all others a great deal may be said about it.

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THE

*Reciprocal Contempt of Nations,*  
 Proceeding from their Vanity.

IT is with nations as with individuals: if every one of us believes himself infallible, places contradiction in the rank of offences, and can neither esteem nor admire any thing in another, but what resembles something in himself; so every nation, in like manner, never esteems in others, any ideas that are not analagous to its own, and every contrary opinion is a seed of contempt.

Let us cast our eyes with rapidity over the universe: there are the English, who take us for giddy-headed mortals, while we say that their brains are disordered. There is the Arab, who, persuaded of the infallibility of his Khalif, laughs at the credulity of the Tartar, who believes the Great Lama immortal. In Africa is the negro, who, paying his adorations to a root, the claw of a lobster, or the horn of an animal, sees nothing on the earth but an immense mass of Deities, and laughs at the scarcity of Gods among us; while the ill-informed musselman accuses us with acknowledging three. Farther still are the inhabitants of the mountain of Bata, who are persuaded that every man who eats a roasted cuckow before his death is a saint; they constantly make a mock of the Indian. "What

" can be more ridiculous, say they, than to bring a



“ cow to the bed of the sick ; and to imagine,  
 “ that if the cow whom they drag along by the  
 “ tail, happens to piss, and some drops of her  
 “ urine fall upon the dying, this renders him a  
 “ faint? What more absurd in the Bramins, than  
 “ to require of their new converts to eat no other  
 “ food for six months than cow’s dung \*.”

The reciprocal contempt of nations is always founded on some difference of manners and customs. From this motive † the inhabitant of Antioch, formerly despised, in the emperor Julian, that simplicity of manners, and that frugality which justly obtained the admiration of the Gauls. The difference of religion, and consequently of opinion, induced at the same time the christians, more zealous than just, to blacken with the most infamous calumnies, the memory of a prince, who by diminishing the taxes, restoring military discipline, and reviving the expiring virtue of the Romans, so justly deserved to be placed in the rank of the greatest emperors ‡.

\* “ Theatre of idolatry, by Abraham Roger.

The cow, according to Vincent le Blanc, is reputed holy and venerable at Calicut. There is nothing that has in general a greater reputation for sanctity : it seems that the custom of eating cows dung by way of penance, is very ancient in the East.

† One of the inhabitants of the Caribbee islands, offended at our contempt, cried out, “ I know no other savages but the “ Europeans, who adopt none of our customs.” of the origin and manners of the Caribbees, by La Borde.

‡ There was engraven on the tomb of Julian at Tarsus, “ Here lies Julian, who lost his life on the banks of the Tigris. He was an excellent Emperor, and a valiant warrior.”

If



If we cast our eyes on all sides, we see every place thus unjust. Each nation convinced, that she is the sole possessor of wisdom, takes all others for fools; and nearly resembles the inhabitants of the Marian islands\*, who, being persuaded that theirs was the only language in the universe, concluded from thence, that all other men knew not how to speak.

If a sage descended from heaven, and in his conduct consulted only the light of reason, he would universally pass for a fool. He would be, as Socrates says, like a physician, whom the pastry-cooks accused before a tribunal composed of children, for having prohibited the eating of pies and tarts; and would certainly be condemned. In vain would this sage support his opinions, by the strongest demonstrations; all the nations would be with respect to him, as the nation of hump-backed people, among whom, as the Indian fabulist say, came a God, beautiful, young, and well proportioned. This God, they add, entered into the capital, where he was soon surrounded by a multitude of the inhabitants: his figure appeared extraordinary; their laughter and talents declared their astonishment: and they were going to carry their affronts still farther, if, to save him from danger, one of the inhabitants, who had doubtless seen other men that were not hump-backed, had not suddenly cried out, O my friends! what are we going to do? Let us not insult this unhappy piece of deformity:

\* Voyages of the Dutch East India company."

if heaven has granted to us all the gifts of beauty, if it has adorned our backs with a mountain of flesh, let us be filled with gratitude to the immortals, repair to the temple, and return thanks to the Gods. This fable is the history of human vanity. All people admire their own defects, and despise the contrary qualities. To succeed in any country, we must carry the hump of the nation into which we travel.

There are in every country but few advocates who plead the cause of the neighbouring nations; few men who acknowledge in themselves the ridicule they cast upon strangers, and take example from I do not know what Tartar, who, on this subject, had the address to make the Great Lama himself blush at his injustice.

This Tartar had travelled through the North, visited the country of the Laplanders, and even purchased a wind of their forcerers\*. On his return to his native country, he related his adventures; and the Great Lama resolving to hear him, was ready to burst his sides with laughing at his story. Of what folly, cried he, is the human mind capable! What fantastical customs! How credulous are the Laplanders! Are these men? Yes indeed, replied the Tartar: I might inform you of something even still more surprising. These Laplanders, with their ridiculous wizards, laugh no

\* The Laplanders have forcerers, who sell to mariners, pieces of cord with knots tied at certain distances, which are to give them a favourable wind.

less at our credulity than thou dost at theirs. Impious! cried the Great Lama, dar'st thou pronounce this blasphemy, and compare my religion with their's? Eternal Father, replied the Tartar, before the secret imposition of thy hand on my head had washed me from sin, I would have represented that thou oughtest not to have engaged thy subjects to make a profane use of their reason. If the severe eye of examination and doubt was spread over all the objects of human belief, who knows whether thy worship itself would be sheltered from the railery of the incredulous? Perhaps thy holy urine, and thy sacred excrements, which thou dost distribute in presents to the princes of the earth, would appear less precious; perhaps they would not find they had still the same favour\*: they would no longer put it powdered into their ragouts, nor any longer mix it in their saucers. Already, in China, does impiety deny the nine incarnations of Vishnou. Thou, whose penetrating view comprehends the past, the present, and the future, hast often repeated it to us: it is to the talisman of blind belief that thou owest thine immortality, and thy power on earth: without this entire submission to thy doctrines, thou wouldest be obliged to quit this abode of darkness, and ascend to heaven, thy native country. Thou knowest that the Lamas, subject to thy power, are one day to raise altars to thee in

\* They give the Grand Lama the name of Eternal Father. The princes are very greedy of his excrements. General history of voyages, tome vii.



all the countries of the world. Who can assure thee, that they will execute this project, without the assistance of human credulity; and that without it, enquiry, which is always impious, will not take the Lamas for Lapland wizards, who sell winds to the fools that buy them? Excuse then, O living Fo, the discourse dictated by my regard for thy worship; and may the Tartar learn of thee to respect the ignorance and credulity which heaven, ever impenetrable in its views, seems to ordain in order to make the earth submit to thee.

Few men perceive the ridicule of their own nation, which they cover from the eye of reason, while under a foreign name, they laugh at their own folly: but there are still fewer nations capable of improving by such advice. All are so scrupulously attached to the interest of their own vanity, that in every country they give the title of wise only to those who, as Fontenelle says, are the fools of the common folly. How fantastic soever a fable is, it is in some nations believed, and whoever doubts of its truth, is treated by that nation as a fool. In the kingdom of Juida, where they adore the serpent, what man dare deny the tale which the Marabouts tell of a hog, which, say they, insulted the divinity of the serpent \*, and eat him up. An holy Marabout, they add, perceived it, and carried his complaints to the king. In an instant, sentence of death was passed upon all the swine: the execution followed, and the whole race was going to be ex-

\* Voyages to Guinea and Cayen, by Father Lebat,  
tirpated,



tirpated, when the people represented to his majesty, that it was not just to punish so many innocent swine for one guilty hog. These remonstrances suspended the prince's wrath: they appeased the grand Marabout, the massacre ceased, and the hogs were ordered to behave with more respect to the deity for the future. Thus, cry the Marabouts, the serpent, to be revenged on the impious, kindled the wrath of kings, that the whole universe might acknowledge his divinity, his temple, and his high priest; at the order of the Marabout appointed to serve him, and of the virgins consecrated to his worship. If retired at the bottom of his sanctuary, the serpent-god, invisible to the sight even of the king himself, receives not his questions, and makes no answer to his requests, but by the mouth of the priest; it is not for mortals to pry into these mysteries with a profane eye: their duty is to believe, to prostrate themselves, and adore.

In Asia, on the contrary, when the Persians\*, stained, with the blood of the serpents sacrificed to the God of goodness, ran to the temple of the Magi, to boast of this act of piety; can it be thought, that if a man had stopped them in order to prove the ridiculousness of their opinion, he would have been well received? The more foolish an opinion is, the more it is praise-worthy, and the more dangerous it is to prove its folly.

Thus Fontenelle was accustomed to say, that, "if he held every truth in his hand, he would take

\* Beausobre's history of Manicheism.

great care not to open it to shew them to men."

In fact, if the discovery of one truth alone, even in Europe, threw Galileo into the prisons of the inquisition, to what punishment would he be condemned who revealed them all \* ?

Among the rational part of my readers, who at this instant laugh at the folly of the human mind, and are filled with indignation at the treatment of Galileo, perhaps there is not one, who in the age of that philosopher, would not have solicited for his death. They would then have been of different sentiments, and in what cruelties are we involved when barbarity and fanaticism are united to our opinions ? How has this union deluged the earth with the most dreadful evils ! and yet it is an union that it must be equally just, useful, and easy to dissolve.

In order to learn to doubt of our opinions, it is sufficient that we examine the powers of our minds, consider the picture of human follies, and recollect that six hundred years after the establishment of universities, there arose an extraordinary man †, who was persecuted by the age in which he lived, and at length placed in the rank of demi-gods, for having taught men to admit nothing for truth of which they had not clear ideas : few men were ca-

\* To think, says Aristippus, is to draw upon ourselves the irreconcilable hatred of the ignorant, the weak, the superstitious, and the corrupt, who all loudly declare themselves against those who would take hold of truth, and in every thing seize whatever is essentially necessary to be known.

† Descartes

pable of knowing the extent of this principle, for amongst the greatest part of mankind principles include no consequences.

However great the vanity of mankind may be, it is certain, that if they frequently call to mind such facts; if, like Fontenelle, they often say to themselves, " Nobody escapes from error, and am " I alone infallible? may I not be deceived in those " very things which I maintain with the greatest " fanaticism?" If men had this idea habitually present to their minds, they would be more on their guard against vanity, more attentive to the objections of their adversaries, and better prepared to perceive the force of truth: they would be more mild; more inclined to toleration, and doubtless would have a less high opinion of their own wisdom. Socrates frequently repeated, " All that I " know is, that I know nothing." In our age we know every thing except what Socrates knew. Men would not be so often surprised into error, were it not for their ignorance; and their folly is in general the more incurable, from their believing themselves wise.

This folly, which is common to all nations, and is in part produced by their vanity, makes them not only despise the manners and customs that are different from their own, but makes them also regard as a gift of nature that superiority which some of them have over others: a superiority that is solely owing to the political constitution of their nation.

THE



## THE TRIPPLE PLEA.

**LAW, PHYSICK, and DIVINITY,**  
 Being in dispute, cou'd not agree  
 To settle, which among them three  
 Shou'd have the Superiority.

**LAW** pleads he does preserve men's lands,  
 And all their goods from rav'nous hands:  
 Therefore of right challenges he,  
 To have the Superiority.

**PHYSICK** prescribes receipts for health,  
 Which men prefer before their wealth:  
 Therefore of right challenges he,  
 To have the Superiority.

Then strait steps up the **PRIEST** demure,  
 Who of men's Souls take care and cure:  
 Therefore of right challenges he,  
 To have the Superiority.

If **JUDGES** end this **TRIPPLE PLEA,**  
 The **LAWYERS** shall bear all the sway.  
 If **EMPIRICS** their verdict give,  
**PHYSICIANS** best of all will thrive.  
 If **BISHOPS** arbitrate the case,  
 The **PRIESTS** must have the highest place.  
 If **HONEST, SOBER, WISE MEN** judge,  
 Then **ALL THE THREE** away may trudge.

For let men live in peace and love,  
 The **LAWYERS** tricks they need not prove.  
 Let them forbear excess and riot,  
 They need not feed on **DOCTOR'S** diet.  
 Let them attend what **GOD** does teach,  
 They need not care what **PARSONS** preach.  
 But if men **FOOLS** and **KNAVES** will be,  
 They'll be afs-ridden by **ALL THREE**.

END

